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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the linguistic behavior of three groups of speakers in reacting to accusatory complaints: (1) native speakers of Italian residing in Italy (SI); (2) native speakers of Canadian English residing in Toronto (CE); and (3) speakers of Italian residing in Toronto, first-generation immigrants, defined as speakers of Italian as a community language (ICL). The resulting description of linguistic and pragmatic behavior of the SI and CE was then used to explain the ICL speakers' possible patterns of divergence from the native norms of Italy, and possible patterns of convergence toward the norms of their adopted country. Speakers' performance was analyzed in terms of positive or negative face-orientation, as well as a number of variables, including social distance and dominance and weak or strong face threat of the complaint. Implications for research on speech act behavior are examined, and new procedures for collecting and analyzing speech act data are suggested, with the goal of understanding the relationship between the preferred or dispreferred status of the second components of an adjacency pair, and the face-orientation of a given speech community. Contains 39 references. (Author/MSE)

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# FACE ORIENTATIONS IN REACTING TO ACCUSATORY COMPLAINTS: ITALIAN $L_1$, ENGLISH $L_1$, AND ITALIAN AS A COMMUNITY LANGUAGE

Marina Frescura

ED 399 812

This article reports the findings of a study dealing with the linguistic behaviour of three groups of speakers in reacting to accusatory complaints:

(1) native speakers of Standard Italian (SI) residing in Italy;
(2) native speakers of Canadian English (CE) residing in Toronto;
(3) speakers of Italian residing in Toronto, first generation immigrants, defined as speakers of Italian as a Community Language (ICL).

The description of the linguistic and pragmatic behaviour of the SI and CE speakers was used to explain the ICL speakers' possible patterns of divergence from the native norm of Italy, and possible patterns of convergence toward the norm of their adopted country. The speakers' performance was analysed in the light of its positive or negative face-orientation, as well as in the light of a number of variables which included not only social distance and dominance, but also the tone of the complaint rated according to its weak or strong threat to the face of the complainee.

The findings have implications for research on speech act behaviour. New procedures are suggested for collecting and analysing speech act data with the goal to understand both the relationship between the preferred and dispreferred status of second components of an adjacency pair, and the face-orientation of a given speech community.

## INTRODUCTION

This article reports on an investigation of the second component of the adjacency pair Accusatory Complaint - Reaction to Accusatory Complaint. This type of complaint is an act which constitutes an 'attack' on the face of complainees because it implies wrong doing of some sort on their part. For example, people may be: a) accused of something that they didn't do, b) accused of something that they did do, but that 'couldn't be helped', or c) accused in a sarcastic or offensive tone, or in such a way as to cause public embarrassment. Complainees may therefore react by admitting their own guilt (i.e., Apologizing), thus saving the face of the complainer, or by defending themselves, thus protecting their own face, in a number of ways: they may deny any responsibility, give an elaborate and compelling explanation for the infraction, express pride in themselves for being first-time offenders, or tell the complainers to control their temper. In order to communicate all the above 'feelings' (complaints and reactions to complaints belong to Searle's (1969) category of 'expressive' speech acts) speakers have to make use of linguistic strategies that allow them to state their case.

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A classification of the strategies available to speakers when reacting to a complaint should therefore take into consideration the two aspects of 'face work' which stem either from the need or desire to protect the complainer's negative face (e.g., "I'm sorry/How clumsy of me/It's all my fault"), or from the need and desire to protect one's own positive face (e.g., "I had nothing to do with it/You know I am always punctual to meetings..., if I was late it means that it couldn't be helped/There is no need to shout.."). First and second language research has focussed to date only on the patterns of Apology in $L_1$ and $L_2$ in a number of languages, English being however the prevalent one. The existing literature (Owen, 1983; Cohen and Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain, 1983, 1989; Olshtain and Weinbach, 1986; Olshtain and Cohen, 1983, 1989; Blum-Kulka, 1984; Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1987; Holmes, 1989, 1990; Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989) seems to confirm that, whatever the language, the Apology speech act is realized by the same universal set of semantic formulae which may be used with different frequencies and with varied intensity, depending on different social and contextual factors.

Although ground breaking for many aspects, these studies do have limitations in terms of research design (e.g., in the areas of selection of subjects, role-play procedure, contextual variables), as well as method of classification and analysis of the data. The aim of the study presented in this article is to address some of these methodological limitations, while at the same time investigating how reactions to accusatory complaints are realized by three groups of speakers whose sociopragmatic behaviour has not previously been described: native speakers of Italian, native speakers of Canadian English, and Italian-Canadians who speak Italian in the large community of post-war immigrants situated in Toronto.

## METHODOLOGY

### The Sample

There were 62 subjects in this study:

Speakers of Standard Italian (SI) residing in Italy: n = 22
Speakers of Standard Canadian English (CE) residing in Toronto: n = 20
Speakers of Italian as a Community Language (ICL)[1] residing in Toronto: n = 20

A written questionnaire was administered to all potential subjects to ensure that selection was done according to the same criteria in terms of age (between the age of 30 and 50), education (post-secondary), and sex (equal number of male and female subjects)[2]. In most research investigating speech act behaviour, the data for both $L_1$ and $L_2$ were elicited from college/university students in their early twenties. This is expected in the case of subjects who supply $L_2$ data, since it is in the language classrooms where one finds sizable samples of $L_2$ learners. However, for the purpose of obtaining a description of native speakers' behaviour, this practice yields information about the speech act behaviour of a very narrow segment of the $L_1$ speakers' population. In order to obtain a description of reactions to complaints representing a mature standard norm, the subjects providing the base for comparison in this study belonged to an older age bracket and were selected from a number of different professions. In the case of the speakers of Standard Italian, the selection of

subjects whose socio-economic status, by virtue of level of education and type of occupation, could be classified as middle class (Chambers and Trudgill, 1980), was of crucial importance. For speakers of this particular socio-economic status, in fact, Standard Italian is fairly uniformly spread across Italy's regions and the risk of running into dialectal differences is therefore highly reduced[3]. Once the selection of the subjects was completed, individual data-collecting sessions were set up for each subject with the investigator.

**The Research Instrument**

*The role-play situations.* The data were elicited through role-play enactments. The use of spontaneous speech data was not considered an option for this study since the nature of the act being investigated does not guarantee any spontaneous occurrence in settings where recording or logging is possible or acceptable. Reactions to complaints prove to be particularly difficult to tap ethnographically especially since complaints are so closely related to a number of factors which might not be known to the investigator, like the role-relationship between the complainer and the complainee, and the nature of the offence. For the investigation of this type of speech act, a carefully designed role-play instrument, although time consuming, offers the best approximation to real interaction while allowing for the control necessary in a cross-linguistic comparison.

The subjects were asked to enact a set of six role-play situations dealing with everyday circumstances with which speakers could easily identify, such as exchanges between parent and child, boss and employee, librarian and library user[4]. The texts of the English and Italian versions of the six situations are in the APPENDIX. Two situations, n. 3 and n. 4, were divided into two different sub-sets, version a) and version b), each corresponding to two different complaints. In one sub-set the complainer reacts to the infraction in a tolerant manner, in the other the complaint is delivered in a tone that may be interpreted as angry or sarcastically abrasive. The rationale for this aspect of the design is given in the next section.

*The social and contextual variables embedded in the role-play situations.* Each role-play situation varied according to two social factors, Dominance and Social Distance, representing the role relationship between the complainer and the complainee, and two contextual factors, Severity of offence and Tone of complaint. The behaviour of $L_1$ and $L_2$ speakers has previously been studied with respect to the role-relationship between the participants, and to the severity of the offence, but it has never been studied with respect to the variable of tone, even though it was included by Hymes (1972) in his acronym SPEAKING. The letter 'K ', in fact, refers to the 'key', namely the manner or the spirit in which the message is delivered. Since a complaint constitutes an attack to the complainee's positive face, the stronger the tone of the complaint appears to be, the more damaging the attack is to one's face. In the present study the tone of the accusation/complaint (Strong vs. Weak, that is aggressive, rude, sarcastic vs. rational, civilized, calm) was therefore taken into consideration as one of the crucial factors which, together with gravity of offence, status and social distance of the participants, can determine the complainee's choice of sociopragmatic behaviour.

Each of the four variable factors was expected to have significant effects on the realization patterns of reactions to accusatory complaints. The rating of the first two variables, Dominance and Social Distance, was done by the investigator. For the rating of the other two variables, Severity and Tone, given their much higher subjectivity, it was considered necessary to consult external raters. Five native speakers of Italian and five native speakers of English rated the Severity of the offence and the Tone of the accusation/complaint for each situation. The two sets of raters agreed on the Strong or Weak Tone of the accusation/complaint for all six situations, but they differed in their evaluation of High and Low Severity. Table 1 gives an overview of the six role-play situations in relations to the ratings of the four variables[5].

**Table 1: Ratings of Social and Contextual Factors in Role-Play Situations**

| | Situation | Domin | Soc Dist | Severity IT/EN | Tone IT/EN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | person forgets meeting with friend | 2 | 1 | High/High | Weak/Weak |
| 2. | parent cannot keep promise to a child | 1 | 1 | Low/High | Weak/Weak |
| 3. | employee is late for meeting with boss | 3 | 2 | High/High | a. Strong/Strong<br>b. Weak/Weak |
| 4. | person bumps into lady at supermarket | 2 | 3 | Low/Low | a. Weak/Weak<br>b. Strong/Strong |
| 5. | driver backs into another car | 2 | 3 | Low/High | Strong/Strong |
| 6. | person returns soiled book to library | 2 | 3 | Low/Low | Strong/Strong |

Dominance: 1 Complainer < Complainee; 2 Complainer = Complainee; 2 Complainer > Complainee

Social Distance: 1 = friends/intimates; 2 = acquaintances; 3 = strangers

Severity: Low; High

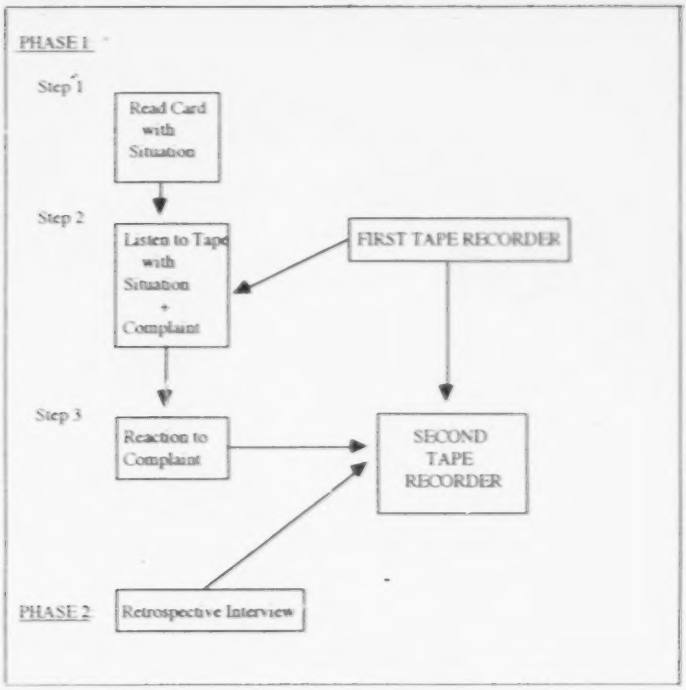
Tone: Weak threat to the face of the complainee; Strong threat to the face of the complainee

*The role-play procedure*. One of the crucial aspects of the instrument design consisted of setting up the conditions for the role-play exchange. A typical role-play instrument has the following set-up: a) subjects read both the context of each situation and the complaint-stimulus from a card; b) the investigator performs the relevant stimulus; c) subjects react to the stimulus. This type of protocol, fairly simple from a practical and technical point of view, presents two serious problems. The first one has to do with possible, albeit unwanted, variations in the repetitions of the same stimulus on the part of the investigator, which make the instrument highly unreliable. In order to ensure that complaints were identical not only in lexical terms, but also in terms of tone, pitch, voice quality, loudness and so forth, the subjects in this study were asked to react to pre-taped stimuli prepared for this purpose, rather than to the live voice of the investigator. Moreover, the texts with the explanation of each situation were also taped so that each stimulus would not be played in a vacuum, but rather as a follow-up to the text with the description of the

setting. The recordings were made by native speakers of Italian and native speakers of English[9]. Separate tapes were prepared for each language. In order to avoid the introduction of an unwanted variable to the study (i.e., linguistic behaviour influenced by the sex of the complainer), all the speakers who performed the stimuli were female. The second problem has to do with the fact that in typical role-play instruments the subjects are given the text of the complaint together with the context of the situation, thus making the actual role-play exchange even more artificial. The role-play procedure in the present study was therefore designed to ensure that the conditions of the exchange were as close as possible to those of naturally occurring interaction. The text of the complaint, therefore, was not written on the card, and the subjects had to react to the pre-taped "surprise stimulus" without any previous knowledge of its content.

After each role-play enactment was completed, the subjects listened to their performance in all six situations. Immediately after, with the tape recorder in 'record' mode, they were asked by the investigator to comment informally on their behaviour: i.e., on their attitude toward the dominance, or lack of it, of the complainer, on their sensitivity to the severity of the offence and to the tone of the complaint, and (for the Italian as a Community Language subjects) on their possible linguistic difficulties. These retrospective interviews were carried out with the goal of gaining further insights into the subjects' rationale for the selection of a specific behaviour. Figure 1 summarises the various steps of the role-play procedure.

**Figure 1: Summary of role-play procedure**




**Analysis of the Data**

*The Formulae: semantic classification.* The data obtained indicated that reactions to accusatory complaints can be performed using one or more of seven semantic formulae. Five of these formulae coincide with the ones included by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) in the Apology Speech Act Set:

(1) Apology: "I am sorry/ I apologize"
(2) Acceptance of Responsibility: "It's my fault"
(3) Explanation: "There was an accident/I had an important meeting"
(4) Repair: "I'll pay for it"
(5) Promise of Forbearance: "It will not happen again"

The classification for the present study includes two more formulae:

(6) Denial: "I didn't do it/ It's not my fault/It's his fault"

This formula, although identified by Olshtain and Cohen was not included as part of the Apology Speech Act Set since it is produced when the speaker chooses not to apologize.

(7) Expression of Appeal: "Try to understand../It could happen to anybody../There is no need to be rude../I always keep my promises..".

The Expression of Appeal is a new formula' which emerged from the data of the present study. With an 'expression of Appeal' the transgressor appeals to the offended party's understanding, leniency in judging the infraction, and self-control. Three sub-formulae have been identified:

a) Appeal to Understanding: "I hope you will understand"
"You know how it is.."
"Sometimes these things happen.."

b) Appeal to Leniency: "Usually I am never late"
"I never missed a meeting before"

c) Appeal to Self-Control: "Relax"
"There is no need to shout!"

*The formulae: face-saving classification.* The classification of the seven formulae according to their semantic load, although indispensable for the analysis of the data of the present study, gives only a partial view of speaker behaviour. Each formula, in fact, in addition to its semantic load, also carries one of two face-saving functions, which are here defined as Hearer-Supportive and Self-Supportive according to their different face-saving target. We define as Hearer-Supportive (HS) formulae the ones used when complainees choose to support the face of the complainer by admitting their own guilt, by recognizing the complainer's rights, by offering compensation. The formulae of Apology, Responsibility, Repair, and Forbearance are, therefore, HS formulae. We define as Self-Supportive (SS) formulae the ones used when complainees choose to support their own face by denying guilt, by appealing to the complainer's leniency, by providing an explanation for the offence. The formulae of Denial, Explanation, and Appeal have been classified as SS formulae. Figure 2 presents an overall view of the semantic and face-saving classification.

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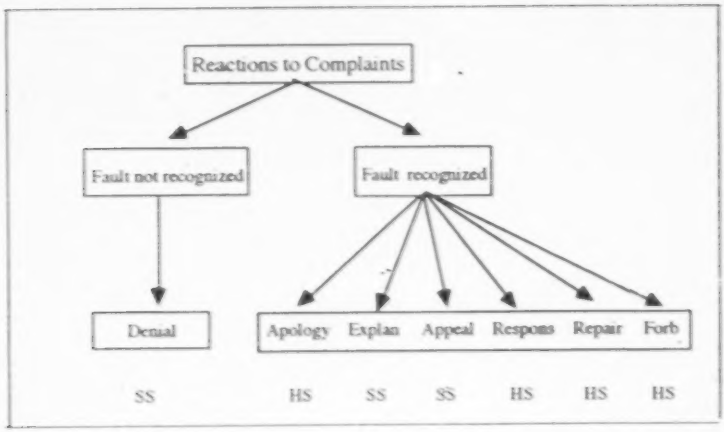
**Figure 2: Overview of classification of formulae**




HS = Hearer Supportive
SS = Self-Supportive

*Statistical analyses.* A series of MANOVAS were carried out to explore differences between and within groups as well as interactions between groups, sex, and the four social and contextual variables. In those instances where the MANOVAS indicated significant differences, follow-up analyses were performed, using the Tukey's Studentized Range Test for between-group comparisons, and the Repeated Measures ANOVA for within-group comparisons. The differences between the two versions (a. and b.) of situations 3 and 4 were explored with a Chi-square analysis. Table 2 presents a synopsis of the research design.

**Table 2: Summary of Research Design**

| Independent variables | Levels | | Dependent variables |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dominance | 1-2-3 | within-subjects factors | HS production |
| Social Dist. | 1-2-3 | | SS production |
| Severity | Low/High | | |
| Tone | Weak/Strong | | |
| Group | SI, CE, ICL | between-subjects factors | |
| Sex | F, M | | |

## RESULTS

### Hearer-Supportive (HS) Formulae: Quantitative Results

The results of the statistical analyses indicated that there was no significant difference between the Standard Italian (SI) and the Canadian English (CE) speakers, as well as between the SI and the Italian as a Community Language speakers (ICL), in the production of Hearer-Supportive (HS) formulae. The CE speakers, however, produced overall significantly more HS formulae than the ICL speakers (difference at $p < .05$ ). With respect to the levels of the four contextual variables, SI speakers indicated that they were sensitive to Social Distance and Tone by producing more HS formulae with friends/intimates than with strangers (difference at $p < .01$), and when the Tone of the complaint was weak rather than strong (difference at $p < .01$). The ICL speakers showed sensitivity to Social Distance but, unlike the SI speakers, produced more HS formulae with strangers than with friends/intimates (difference at $p < .05$). They also showed sensitivity to Severity and produced more HS formulae when they perceived that the severity of the offence was high rater than low (difference at $p < .0001$). The Canadian English (CE) speakers did not show any significant difference in relation to contextual variables for HS formulae production. With respect to the sex of the subjects, female subjects produced overall significantly more HS formulae than male subjects (difference at $p < .05$) across the three language groups. Summaries of results are in Table 3 and Table 4 (see section on Self-Supportive (SS) Formulae: Quantitative Results).

### Hearer-Supportive (HS) Formulae: Qualitative Results

The data indicated that the speakers of the three groups used the same set of four Hearer-Supportive formulae: Apology, acceptance of Responsibility, offer of Repair, promise of Forbearance. The frequency with which the formulae were used varied from group to group, and from one situation to another. The promise of Forbearance was used very little in general and mostly in situations 1 and 3 (person is late for meeting with friend and boss). There were qualitative differences with respect to the range of expressions used to perform the other three HS formulae. It was found that the CE speakers, although producing overall more Apology formulae than the SI speakers, used only four expressions:

"I am sorry" (very/so/really/terribly/awfully...)
"Sorry about that"
"I apologize"
"Forgive me"

The speakers of Standard Italian (SI), although apologizing with less frequency, used a much larger and more diversified repertoire of apologies:

"Mi spiace/dispiace" (*I am sorry*)
"Sono desolato/mortificato/spiacente" (*I am mortified*)
"Non ho parole per scusarmi" (*I have no words to express how sorry I am...*)
"Mi scuso" (*I apologize*)
"Le/Ti chiedo scusa" (*I request your forgiveness*)

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"Non posso che scusarmi" (*I cannot do anything else except apologize*)
"Mi scusi/scusami/mi perdoni/perdonami (*Forgive me*)
"La/Ti prego di scusarmi" (*I beg you to forgive me*)[5]

The SI speakers therefore indicated that they have at their disposal a whole range of different expressions, from bland to melodramatic, to express different degrees of intensity, while the CE speakers intensified Apology formulae by adding an adverb to the prevalently used "I am sorry". The ICL speakers also proved to be very limited in the range of their Apology expressions. They used mostly "Mi dispiace" (49.37%) which translates literally the English expression "I am sorry" and presents the advantage of not requiring the speakers to change its form from formal to familiar (the tu/lei distinction parallel to the tu/vous in French). When the expression "scusa/scusi" (the most common with the SI speakers) was used, the wrong tu/lei form was selected 60% of the times. The formula of Responsibility was realized in similar ways by the three samples, but differences were found between male and female subjects across the three groups. In recognizing their guilt, the female subjects had a tendency to use self-derogatory expressions with high frequency than male as it can be seen from the following expressions:

CE female speakers
"I feel like such a klutz"
"Excuse my clumsiness"
"I guess I was blind, today"
"I should have been more careful"
"I cannot believe that I have done it again"

SI female speakers
"Sono proprio sbadata" (*I am really forgetful*)
"Lo sai che sono una pasticciona" (*You know that I am messy*)
"Ormai penso che tu mi conosca.. dimentico le cose.." (*By now you should know me... I forget about things...*)
"Andavo in giro come un' oca" (*I was going around like a silly goose*)

ICL female speakers
"Purtroppo forse la mia memoria è partita" (*Unfortunately, I am afraid that also my memory is gone*)
"Sono un po' distratta oggi" (*I am a bit careless today*)
"Oh, mio dio, un'altra volta!" (*Oh, my god, I have done it again!*)

The qualitative analysis of the data also revealed interesting differences between the three groups of speakers in the realization patterns of the HS formula 'offer of Repair' particularly in situations 5 (parking lot). The speakers of Standard Italian, who perceived this offence as having low Severity, although annoyed by the tone of the driver of the other car ("Ma è cieco? Guardi che cosa ha combinato!"/*Are you blind?! Look what you' have done!*), were very careful in admitting responsibility and delegated to their insurance company the task of dealing with the problem:

"Beh, non si tratta di essere ciechi, purtroppo un errore può succedere, ecco gli estremi della mia assicurazione"
(*It is not a matter of being blind, anyone can make a mistake, here is my insurance number*)
"Ci penserà la mia assicurazione.. è un inconveniente.." (*My insurance will deal with it,... it is nothing serious...*)
"Io sono assicurata, le assicuro che il suo danno verrà pagato" (*I am insured, I assure you that you will be reimbursed*)

The Canadian English speakers, instead, in line with their perception of this offence as having high Severity (see Table 1), recognized their fault more readily than the Italian speakers, and offered a less business-like type of Repair:

"Let's sit down and talk about this, and let's get organized and write down each other's name and insurance number..."
"Let's look at the insurance and we'll straighten this out.."
"Here is my insurance number, we'll get it fixed up.."
"Why don't you show me what happened and we'll look after it..".

This latter set of utterances shows the English speakers behaving as 'participants' to the repair process ("let's," "we'll"), while the previous set of utterances shows the Italian speakers behaving as 'spectators' who protect their own face by distancing themselves from the event.

The ICL speakers differed from both the SI and the CE speaker in their formulation of offers of Repair with respect to the same situation. Of the subjects who offered some sort of compensation for the damages (75%), only a small number (4%) proposed to go through official channels, namely calling the police or the insurance company. The remainder of the subjects proposed a 'private settlement', either implicitly or explicitly:

"Pago tutto il danno/Quello che è pago" (*I'll pay for the damages/Whatever it is I'll pay*)
"Quello che si deve pagare lei mi fa sapere" (*Let me know what I have to pay*)
"Sono proposta a dargli un ricompenso*9 di questo danno/"Le faccio* una compensazione*" (*I am ready to give you compensation*)
"Le do il mio numero e ci mettiamo d'accordo" (*I'll give you my number and we'll reach an agreement*)

How can this behaviour be explained? The more readily available explanation is that perhaps the decision to opt for a 'private settlement' is just a reflection of this particular group of subjects' desire to avoid the hassle of having to pay a higher insurance premium. If this were the case, it would still have to be explained why this group of speakers opted for this behaviour with higher frequency than the SI (10.52%) and the CE (11.76%) speakers. Another possible explanation can be found in the particular background of the ICL speakers. Research on post-war Italian immigration in Canada, indicates that the immediate needs of the immigrant population were to find work and provide for their families. These needs translated into keeping a low profile, trying at all costs not to run into problems with

the 'authorities' who had the power of giving them work but also the power of "sending them back" (Harney, 1978; Sturino, 1981; Zucchi, 1988; Bagnell, 1989). The ICL subjects, all born or raised in Toronto from a very early age, may have absorbed this type of self-protecting behaviour from their parents. At this point, if this explanation is considered acceptable, it would be interesting to observe how the ICL speakers realize this type of Repair in English. In these circumstances, do they switch to 'English rules', thereby showing a duality of language and culture, or do they adhere to the rules of the Italian Community in Toronto, thus revealing that the need to 'belong', and 'to be accepted' is still there after one generation?

**Self-Supportive (SS) Formulae: Quantitative Results**

The results of the statistical analyses indicated that the speakers of Standard Italian produced overall more Self-Supportive (SS) formulae (Denial, Explanation, and Appeal) than the Canadian English (CE) speakers and the Italian as a Community Language (ICL) speakers (difference at $p < .05$). None of the three language groups showed significant differences in production of Self-Supportive formulae according to the various levels of each variable. Female speakers produced overall more SS formulae with friends/intimates and acquaintances than with strangers, while male speakers produced more SS formulae with friends/intimates than with acquaintances (both differences at $p < .01$). Summaries of the results are in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3: Summary of main effects of group, sex, and interactions of sex x level of variable for production of HS and SS formulae**

| Overall | HS | SS |
|---|---|---|
| group | CE>ICL | SI>CE , ICL |
| sex | F > M | 0 |
| sex x dominance | 0 | 0 |
| sex x social distance | 0 | F = 1,2 > 3<br>M = 1 > 3 |
| sex x severity | 0 | 0 |
| sex x tone | 0 | 0 |

F= female, M = male
0 = no significant effect
> = larger than

Social distance: 1= friends/intimates
2= acquaintances
3= strangers

**Table 4: Summary of interactions of group x level of variable for production of HS and SS formulae**

| Variable | Group | HS | SS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dominance | SI | 0 | 0 |
| | CE | 0 | 0 |
| | ICL | 0 | 0 |
| Social Distance | SI | 1>3 | 0 |
| | CE | 0 | 0 |
| | ICL | 3>1,2 | 0 |
| Severity | SI | 0 | 0 |
| | CE | 0 | 0 |
| | ICL | high > low | 0 |
| Tone | SI | weak>strong | 0 |
| | CE | 0 | 0 |
| | ICL | 0 | 0 |

Dominance: 1= complainer lower than, 2=equal to, 3=higher than complainee
Social Distance: 1= friends/intimates, 2=acquaintances, 3=strangers
0 = no significant effect
> = larger than

**Self-Supportive (SS) Formulae: Qualitative Results**

A qualitative analysis of the data revealed that, in addition to the documented quantitative differences, the SI, CE, and ICL speakers also differed in the realization patterns of the Explanation, Appeal, and Denial formulae in some of the role-play situations. For example, in situation 2 (reacting to the complaint of the child) the Canadian English speakers offered general and broad explanations:

"There was something that required my attention"
"Right now I have to attend to these matters"
"This is something I cannot get out of"

while the Standard Italian speakers made an attempt at being more specific:

"Mi hanno telefonato dall'ufficio e non posso proprio mancare.." (*They called me from the office and I have to show up...*)
"Non pensavo di dovermi fermare a scuola ancora per un'ora..." (*I didn't think I would have to stay in school for another hour..*)
"Ho avuto degli impegni molto, molto urgenti..." (*There was something very, very urgent that I had to do..*)

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Once more in situation 3 the CE speakers (regardless of the tone of the boss) offered perfunctory, general, and impersonal explanations:

"It was just one of those things"
"Something came up.."
"My car broke down"
"I got stuck in traffic"
"I was needed at home"
"I got held up"

while in the same situation, the SI speakers (also regardless of the tone of the boss) produced more detailed and personalized accounts:

"C'è stato un incidente sull'autostrada e ho dovuto fermarmi" (*There was an accident on the highway and I had to stop*)
"C'era una persona malata che doveva essere accompagnata al pronto soccorso" (*There was a sick person who had to be taken to the emergency*)
"Purtroppo avevo il bambino che non stava bene.." (*Unfortunately my child was not feeling well*)

The ICL speakers displayed linguistic difficulties resulting in lack of diversification:

"Ho dimenticato" (*I forgot*)
"Sono stata molto occupata al lavoro" (*I have been very busy at work*)
"Avevo tante cose da fare" (*I had many things to do*)

For the formula of Appeal, the SI speakers produced a broader repertoire of sub-formulae than the CE speakers. For example in situation 2 (child complaining to parent), the SI speakers used the Appeal formula to give a mini-lecture on duties and responsibilities:

"Tu sai benissimo che ci sono dei doveri ..che si devono osservare" (*You know very well that certain obligations have to be met...*)
"Non sempre si può avere quello che si vuole nella vita.." (*One cannot always have what one wants from life...*)
"Purtroppo gli impegni di lavoro sono inderogabili" (*Unfortunately business engagements cannot be postponed*)

In situation 3 the Appeal formula was used by the SI speakers to remind the complainer (the boss) of the rarity of the occurrence:

"In genere, se prometto qualcosa cerco di mantenerlo..." (*Usually when I make a promise I try to keep it..*)
"Sono abituato a rispettare sempre i miei impegni" (*I am always used to meet my obligations*)
D'accordo, sono arrivato in ritardo, però è un caso del tutto eccezionale.' (*Yes, I was late, but there were exceptional circumstances*)

In situation 5, (parking lot) the formula of Appeal was used by the SI speakers to elicit understanding:

"Una cosa del genere può capitare a tutti." (*It can happen to anybody*)

but mostly to elicit self-control:

"Non c'è bisogno di urlare.." (*There is no need to shout*)
"Ma, abbia pazienza.." (*Well, try to be tolerant...*)

The Appeal formulae produced by the CE speakers, instead, were less diversified across the six role-play situations than those produced by the SI speakers and were for the most part aimed at obtaining the complainer's understanding:

"Try to understand.."
"You know these things happen"
"All I ask you to do is try to understand.."
"I mean... everybody make mistakes..".

The Italian as a Community Language speakers, though using a reduced range of expressions, showed a behaviourial 'melange', consisting of convergence toward the English norm as well as maintenance of the Italian norm. For situation 2, for example, (not being able to keep a promise to one's child), they talked about duties and responsibilities as the SI speakers did:

"Lo sai che quando si è medici bisogna fare dei sacrifici" (*You know that when one is a doctor one must make some sacrifices*)
"La mamma ha delle responsabilitá che non può rimandare" (*Mommy has some responsibility that she can't postpone*)

while at the same time resorting to general requests for understanding and self-control, as the CE speakers did:

"Sono cose che succedono" (*These things can happen*)
"No, non sono cieca...."(*No, I am not blind..*)
"Non è necessario essere così sarcastici.. (*It is not necessary to be so sarcastic..*)

While the Appeal and Explanation formulae were distributed across the six role-play situations, the formula of Denial, for contextual reasons, was mostly used in situation 6 (librarian complains that a damaged book has been returned). The native speakers of Italian produced a wider range of sub-formulae than the native speakers of English to deny the irresponsibility for the infraction:

"Io non sono stato" (*It wasn't me*)
"Non è colpa mia" (*It's not my fault*)
"Non ritengo/non credo di averlo sporcato io" (*I don't think I dirtied the book*)
"Io non ho rovesciato niente..." (*I did not spill anything...*)

"A me non risulta.." (*I don't think so..*)
"Sono certo di non avergli rovesciato niente addosso" (*I am sure I didn't spill anything on it..*)

or to blame another library user for the damage:

"L'ho trovato così" (*I found it that way*)
"Era già così" (*That's the way it was*)
"È sicura che non fosse sporco già prima?" (*Are you sure it was not dirty before?*)
"Ma.. qui.. era già sporco prima..." (*But...here.. it was already dirty before..*)
"Mi è stato consegnato così." (*I received it that way*)
"Sarà stato qualcun altro....." (*It must have been someone else...*)

and even to blame the librarian for not doing her work properly:

"Probabilmente me l'ha dato già sporco.." (*You probably gave it to me already dirty*)
"Vuole dire che lei non ha controllato bene un'altra persona.."
(*What it means is that you didn't check carefully another person*)
"Lei non si ricorda [di avermelo dato già sporco].. stia più attenta!"
(*You do not remember [that you gave me a damaged book] Be more careful!*)

The CE speakers repeated in various ways that they had nothing to do with the damaged book:

"I didn't spill anything on it"
"I have no idea what happened"
"I certainly didn't ruin it myself"

and only in few instances they attempted, albeit indirectly, to blame another library user for the damage:

"It was that way when I took it out"
"That's the way it came.. sorry.."

The Italian Canadian speakers had a much more reduced range of expressions of Denial than the Standard Italian speakers and showed similarities with the Canadian English speakers by limiting their selection to two types of sub-formulae: denying their own involvement or blaming indirectly someone else. The formula of Denial, more than the others, showed a high percentage of repetitions occurring in the same utterance, as for example in: "I don't think I did that... I am pretty sure it might have been there before, because.. I don't know... I don't recall spilling anything..". If higher number of repetitions are equated with higher intensity, as suggested by Vollmer and Olshtain (1989), then the SI subjects in situation 6 produced more intense Denial than the CE subjects, since 50% of the native speakers of Italian produced two or three formulae of Denial in the same utterance, while only 28.57% of the CE speakers did so. The ICL speakers' performance was similar

to that of the SI speakers. In situation 6, in fact, 40% of the ICL subjects produced the formula of Denial two or three times in the same utterance.

From a qualitative point of view there were no major gender differences in the way the formulae of Denial and Appeal were realized across the three language groups. The formula of Explanation, instead, presented the following differences: the female subjects, showing an overall tendency toward a 'personal' type of explanation, were the only ones to produce formulae dealing with family matters, personal illnesses, and children needing care and attention: "My child was sick/I was needed at home/ I had to go to a funeral", while the male subjects opted for the 'external' cause: "There was an accident/Traffic was bad/The previous meeting finished late".

**Retrospective Interviews**

The speakers of Canadian English revealed that, contrary to the results of the quantitative analyses, they were indeed sensitive to Dominance, Severity of the offence and Tone of the complaint. In fact, fifty per cent of the subjects admitted that they were sensitive to a complainer with higher status and said that in situation 3 (late for a meeting) they apologized, regardless of the tone of the complaint, because they "had to, it was the boss, so..". They also said that they apologized when they felt it justified by the infraction: "Well ...it was pretty bad, and if I did actually do it, than it is my fault and I should apologize", and that "when you let someone down" it is necessary to apologize. In the retrospective interviews a large number of CE subjects (52.38%) also admitted, albeit indirectly, of being sensitive to Tone by reporting that when someone is aggressive or rude, as the boss in situation 3, they chose to "back down" because "to react back irritates the whole situation and makes it worse", and it would mean "lowering myself to their level". Therefore "the only thing to do is to defuse the situation" by being even more apologetic, because "it's a strategy, not to get upset". For example, in situation 4, where the lady in the supermarket reacted loudly, a few informants admitted that they were irritated by the tone because "after all it was an accident", but apologized and offered to pick up the packages because "she was loud and everyone could hear". This desire, on the part of the CE speakers, to avoid unnecessary conflicts reaches its highest point in situation 6, where the librarian accused the library user of returning a damaged book. In reacting to the librarian's accusation, three subjects, although denying of having spilled anything on the book, offered to pay for the damages just the same. Asked about the reasons for this behaviour, one subject eloquently summarized it by saying that she offered to pay for the damages "because the cost of replacing a book, wouldn't be worth a real battle".

The comments made by the CE subjects in the retrospective interviews proved, therefore, to be very useful for the interpretation of the results, since they brought to light the fact that the even distribution of HS formulas by the CE speakers was not the result of their lack of sensitivity to social or contextual factors, but it was rather the outcome of carefully premeditated and planned strategic behaviour. As for gender differences, their comments revealed that a large percentage of subjects (42.85%) were sensitive to the sex of the complainer for situations 3 (the boss) and 5 (the parking lot). Of this group, the male subjects said that they would have been kinder with a female interlocutor, while the comments of the female subjects indirectly suggested the opposite:

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"With a man I would have been a little more intimidated, because I have never had the experience of working with men"
"I might have been more humorous with a man...because generally I can relate much better with men... and I can make heavy situations lighter.."
"To a man I would have offered more explanations.."
"I would have been less nervous with a man... I do not like women bosses because they are more domineering.."

The speakers of Standard Italian (SI) in the retrospective interviews confirmed the results of the quantitative analyses with respect to their reactions to the Tone of the accusatory complaint. Fourteen subjects out of twenty-two admitted that they reacted "al contenuto e al comportamento, non alla posizione degli altri" (*to content and behaviour, not to the status of others*) and stated that "secondo come mi trattano io reagisco" (*I react according to the way I am treated*), since "quello che mi da piú fastidio di tutto é proprio il tono, ancora piú della sostanza.." (*what annoys me more than anything is the tone, even more than the "substance"*). A few subjects, however, admitted that "Nell'ambito del lavoro, lo status conta, nell'ambiente non di lavoro dipende dal tono della persona" (*In the work place status is important, outside the work place it all depends on the tone of the person*) and that in the case of the boss "ho dovut o frenare la mia reazione" (*it was necessary to tone down my reaction*). The last two statements are in contradiction with the quantitative results which show that the Dominance factor did not have any effect on the performance of the SI speakers.

Only a small percentage of native speakers of Italian (22.73%) commented that, had the complainer been male, they would have reacted differently in situations 3 (the boss) and 5 (the parking lot). Of this small group, both male and female subjects said that they would have been less kind and more direct with a male interlocutor (examples 1 and 2 come from male subjects, examples 3 and 4 from females):

(1) "Con un uomo sarei stato piú brusco" (*With a man I would have been harsher..*)
(2) "Con un uomo sarei stato un po' piú duro,.. forse da un uomo penso di dovermi difendere di piú.. io normalmente non percepisco le donne come aggressive.."(*With a man I would have been harder..maybe because I expect that with a man I have to be more defensive...I normally do not perceive women to be aggressive..*)
(3) "Forse sarei stata meno gentile con l'automobilista uomo...con una donna c'é piú solidarietá.. un po' meno prevenzione..." (*Maybe I would have been less kind with a male driver.. with a woman there is more solidarity.. I am less biased..*)
(4) "Forse un a voce femminile mi dá piú sicurezza" (*Maybe a female voice reassures m more..*)

In the retrospective interviews, the Italian as a Community Language (ICL) subjects' comments were in line with the quantitative results which indicate sensitivity to the Severity of the infraction and lack of sensitivity for the Dominance of the complainee. As for the variable of Tone, a different picture emerged. Some of the subjects (30%) declared that they

were indeed sensitive to Tone in the same way the native speakers of Italian were, as it is evident from some of their comments: "se qualcuno diventa un po' troppo aggressivo, finisco di essere un gentiluomo e divento piú aggressivo di lui.." (*when someone becomes too aggressive, I stop being a gentleman and I become even more aggressive..*), " .. io soprattutto reagisco al tono.." (*I mainly react to the tone..*) , "Ci sono delle volte in cui tutto dipende dal modo in cui la gente si comporta..(*There are times when everything depends on the way people behave..*). A much larger number of subjects (70%), although declaring that they were not sensitive to the Tone of the complaint, indirectly admitted the opposite. In their comments, which were very similar to those of the CE speakers, they reported that they had a tendency to "defuse an aggressive speaker", "to avoid confrontation", in order "to prevent the situation from deteriorating". As was the case for the CE speakers, the comments made by the ICL subjects in the retrospective interviews revealed that they were indeed sensitive to the Tone of the complaint and that their linguistic behaviour was the outcome of a deliberate strategy.

A large number of ICL speakers (47.37%) declared to be sensitive to the gender of the complainer. The comments made by the male speakers were in line with what was said by the SI and the CE male speakers, namely that they perceived themselves as being kinder with women than with other men. One subject recognized that his reactions would have been "not different but stronger " with a male interlocutor, and another one said that the situations were "slightly unrealistic, because I associate more with men than with women". Two male subjects were caught by surprise in situation 1, when they discovered that the friend whom they had to meet was female: "All my friends are male", or "I had to pretend I was still a university student". The comments made by the female subjects were varied. Some female subjects said that they resented a rude female interlocutor because between women there should be a sort of bond, a few were surprised that the "boss" was actually a woman, others said that they would have "reacted differently with a man" by trying "to raise the level of her answers" and by trying "to be humorous". Only two said that they would have been "more aggressive" with a man in the car accident situation.

The comments made in the retrospective interviews contributed a great deal to the understanding of the behaviour of the three language groups, in particular of the ICL speakers. This group of subjects, although required to use only Italian in the role-plays, were allowed to choose the language they felt more comfortable with for the retrospective interviews. The result was that almost all the subjects alternated between the two languages, often interspersing the Italian narrative with English words, sometimes in a conscious way, "I can't say this in Italian..." or "I'd better say it in English", often switching from one language to another[10] for entire sentences without any warning. They all acknowledged their limitations in Italian, by saying in various ways that they felt that the use of Italian restricted their performance: "in English I would have said more", "my reactions would have been longer". A few subjects said that they "didn't want to make mistakes" and others said that in their reactions they took "a non committal kind of stand because I didn't feel at ease with the language" or they felt 'flat' because of the language, "If I am angry I'd show it... in Italian I am more neutral". This confirms what Harder (1975) and Thomas (1983) call the "severely circumscribed role" of the foreigner who, no longer able to express strong opinions, seems condemned to a "reduced personality" in the second language. Having to struggle through every role-play exchange was not only a frustrating experience from a

linguistic point of view, but also a powerful reminder of the ongoing loss of their language and culture as a result of the ICL community's assimilation into their adopted country. The ICL subjects' performance, however, was more diversified in situations which revolved around the domain of family and friends, with whom they would be more likely to use Italian, than in those situations in which they would almost certainly use English.

## CONCLUSION

This article proposed a description of Reactions to Accusatory Complaints as performed in three language varieties: Standard Italian, Canadian English, and the variety of Italian spoken in Toronto by first generation Italian-Canadians. The data, elicited through a set of role-play enactments, were coded according to a taxonomy comprising seven semantic formulae grouped under two super-ordinate categories: Hearer-Supportive, including those formulae providing gratification and support for the face of the complainers, and Self-Supportive, including those formulae uttered when speakers choose to protect their own face.

The major findings, seen in light of a universal theory of politeness, suggest that speakers of Standard Italian have an overall preference for the Self-Supportive category of formulae, while the speakers of Canadian English have a more pronounced tendency toward the Hearer-Supportive ones. In Brown and Levinson's (1978) terminology, therefore, the Canadian English speakers displayed a negative-politeness orientation, since they had a more marked preference than the Standard Italian group toward strategies which protect the complainers' negative face. The speakers of Standard Italian, instead, had a more marked preference toward strategies which protect their own positive face, just as Brown and Levinson would expect from cultures with a positive-politeness orientation. Ironically, the 'considered toward others' behaviour preferred by the Canadian English speakers turns out to be advantageous for their own face, since they are generally stereotyped as being controlled, polite, calm. The self-protective behaviour of the Standard Italian speakers, instead, turns out to be disadvantageous for their face, as they are usually stereotyped as rude and volatile by speakers of other languages.

The findings pertaining to the Italian Canadian speakers, although indicating linguistic and pragmatic convergence toward English, also point to language maintenance. This corroborates the findings of Tannen (1981, 1982) who, in her study of Greek-Americans' speech behaviour found that the ancestral language emerged not only in their phonology and syntax, but also in their sociolinguistic patterns even when the original language was completely lost. The linguistic and pragmatic competence of the Italian-Canadian speakers can be described in terms of a reversed transitional competence (Corder, 1967), best defined as **attritional competence**. While the first term refers to the interim competence of $L_2$ learners in their journey along the interlanguage continuum, the second term is here used for the first time to define the Italian Canadian speakers' gradual journey toward language loss.

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## NOTES

[1]I choose the term "community language" (Tosi 1985, 1986) rather than "heritage language" since it best describes the position of a language spoken outside the country by a group of immigrants (i.e., Italian spoken in Canada) in relation to the norm spoken by those residing in the country (i.e., Italian spoken in Italy).

"In Canada, the two terms 'native languages' and 'heritage languages' (formerly 'ancestral') are still currently used to designate all non-official languages. The former refers to Amerindian and Inuit languages, whilst the latter names all the languages spoken by immigrant groups except French and English (Cummins, 1983; Allen and Swain, 1984); however, in one recent study 'heritage' has been occasionally replaced by 'community' (Cummins, 1984)." (Tosi, 1986, p. 4). "The concept of 'community language' is tightly connected with that of language maintenance", that is the phenomenon of "adults" language retention and their ability to transmit the minority language to the next generation " (Tosi, 1986, p. 6). Tosi recognizes that there is a discrepancy between the minority children's competence in the home language and that of their monolingual contemporaries speaking in the family the same language spoken outside (i.e., in the country of origin of parents and grandparents) due to a variety of conditions: a) the facilities for language retention by parents and relations; b) the presence outside the home of a different language used for work and social interaction which may also affect the home language used by the child's caretakers; c) the impact of the outside language which may reach children directly via media and siblings during their first socialization (Tosi, 1986, p. 5-6).

[2]The questionnaire was also designed to ensure the following: i) for the speakers of Canadian English (CE), that the subjects' parents were also native speakers of English to ensure that their English performance would not be influenced, either culturally or linguistically, by another language they might have learned as children. The particular composition of Toronto's multicultural population made this criterion necessary; ii) for the Speakers of Italian as a Community Language (ICL) it was necessary to confirm that the subjects selected were either born in Toronto of immigrant Italian parents or had immigrated from Italy before attending school.



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[3]An impressive number of publications (Migliorini, 1967; Altieri-Biagi, 1978; Devoto, 1979; Simone, 1975; Sabatini, 1981; Beccaria, 1988; to name just a few) give an account of how the Italian literary language, written and spoken by few until the last century, has become the "language of all Italians" in little over one hundred years of national unity (1861). With this linguistic unification, brought about by compulsory education, the influence of national radio and television, and the media in general, the regional dialects have lost their position of prominence, yielding to a situation in which the majority of the population knows both Standard Italian and, in some cases only passively, a regional dialect.

[4]In order to ensure that subjects would not become mechanical in their reactions, three additional role-play situations, aimed at eliciting speech acts other than Reactions to Complaints (namely Congratulating, Thanking, Reassuring), were introduced as distractors.

[5]Situations 4, 5, and 6 were set-up with similar social factors, Dominance and Social Distance, to study further the realization of reactions to complaints between strangers. A pilot study conducted in preparation for the present investigation, indicated that native speakers of Italian were particularly sensitive to the tone of the complaint when the person issuing it was a stranger with equal dominance. It was therefore deemed necessary to use more than one situation with this particular role-relationship between the complainer and the complainee.

[6]Since it was important to ensure that the Italian and the English stimuli were enacted with equivalent tone, two additional native speakers of Italian and two additional native speakers of English (with similar age and socio-economic status to those of the subjects) were consulted. As a result of their feedback, two stimuli were modified and re-taped.

[7]Andrew Cohen (personal communication), informs me that his own Hebrew and American English data show the presence of utterances of the "Appeal" type. They were classified as general comments, however, and were not identified as part of the Apology speech acts set.

[8]The English translation may not always convey the same illocutionary force of the Italian text. For the purpose of helping those readers who are not fully familiar with the Italian language, however, the translations supplied in this article give a fairly good approximation.

[9]Errors of a syntactic, morphological, and lexical nature are marked with an asterisk.

[10]It is of interest to note that the Italian Canadian speakers were able to monitor their production more carefully during the actual role-plays, where code-switches were produced with very low frequency.

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## APPENDIX

**SITUATION N. 1**
You forgot a meeting with a friend; this is the second time that the same thing had happened with the same person. At the end of the day your friend phones you and says: *"I waited for you more than an hour! What happened?"*

Lei ha dimenticato un appuntamento con un'amica. Purtroppo é la seconda volta che una cosa simile si ripete. Verso sera la sua amica telefona e le dice:
*"Ma.., ti ho aspettato piú di un'ora! Che cosa é successo?"*

---

**SITUATION N. 2**
You promised your daughter (age 12) to go shopping with her, but important matters at work require your immediate attention and you cannot keep your promise. You call home to explain the situation and your daughter says: *"It's not fair! You promised!"*

Lei ha promesso a sua figlia (12 anni) di portarla a fare compere, ma degli urgenti impegni di lavoro le impediscono di mantenere la promessa. Lei telefona a casa per spiegare la situazione e sua figlia dice: *"Ma non é giusto! Me lo avevi promesso!"*

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**SITUATION N. 3**
You arrived late at an important business meeting. Your boss was counting on your presence because she needed your support on a very important matter. At the end of the meeting, in private, your boss tells you:

**Version 1**
"Thanks a lot..!"

**Version 2**
"Too bad you were not at the meeting.."

Lei é arrivato/a in ritardo ad un'importante riunione di lavoro. Il suo capo contava sulla sua presenza e sul suo appoggio circa una importante questione. Alla fine della riunione, in privato, il suo capo le dice:

**Version 1**
*"Mille grazie del favore, eh..?"*

**Version 2**
*"Mi dispiace che lei non fosse presente..."*

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**SITUATION N. 4**
You are at the supermarket and on your way out you bump into a lady carrying her groceries. Some of the bags she is carrying spill on the floor and she says:

**Version 1**
"Oh, my goodness!"

**Version 2**
"Look what you have done! Couldn't you be more careful?"

Lei si trova in un supermercato e all'uscita si scontra con una signora carica di borse della spesa. Nell'urto alcune borse cadono e si roves ciano e la signora dice:

**Version 1**
"Oh, santo cielo, guarda che pasticcio!"

**Version 2**
"Guardi cosa ha combinato! Non poteva fare un po' d'attenzione?"

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**SITUATION N. 5**
While parking your car, you run into the side of another car and dent it. The driver gets out and says:"Hey, are you blind? Why don't you watch where you are going!"

Nel parcheggiare la macchina, lei urta e danneggia un'altra machina. La proprietaria esce e le dice: *"Ma é cieco? Stia un po' attento a quello che fa!"*

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**SITUATION N. 6**
You return a book to the library. As you are about to leave, the librarian calls you back and tells you: *"The book you just returned is damaged. It looks as if something has been spilled on it..."*

Lei restituisce un libro in biblioteca. Mentre sta per uscire, la bibliotecaria la chiama e le dice: *"Guardi che questo libro é sporco! C'é stato rovesciato sopra qualcosa.."*

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